



— Montana Office of Public Instruction —

SENATE EDUCATION
EXHIBIT NO. 5
DATE 2-5-07
BILL NO. 554

Linda McCulloch
State Superintendent

January 4, 2007

The Honorable Max Baucus
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus,

The Rural Schools and Community Act (RSCA) of 2000 passed with wide bi-partisan support – largely resulting from your leadership in the Senate. The RSCA preserved over \$14 million in revenue to continue servicing Montana schools and counties in heavily forested areas, and more than \$400 million nationally. Now those critical resources are in jeopardy.

The resources are sizable in counties where the taxable land base decreased with the designation of large tracts of land as national forest. For counties and schools in the Western half of Montana, the payments make up a large portion of their total budgets. Without these funds, communities are considering a wide range of undesirable options including local gas taxes and local-option sales taxes. For our small schools, every dollar counts, and in many instances, the reductions will be substantial.

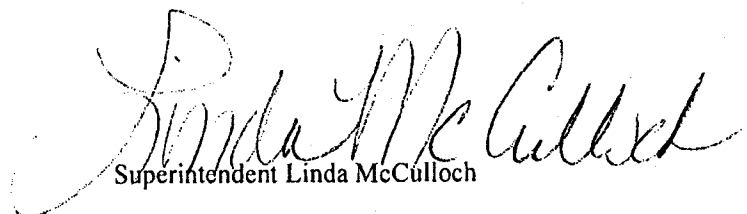
We are deeply appreciative of the efforts you have made to preserve funding and to do it in a responsible way. We appreciate your opposition to the Department of Agriculture's proposal to sell large tracts of national forest lands which would have done even more long term harm to Montana schools and counties.

The mid-term elections present a strong opportunity for Congress to do right by states and counties that faithfully preserve and steward national treasures for the enjoyment of all Americans. We strongly urge that Congress, in the opening days of the 110th session, truly demonstrate a new course by passing an immediate supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$410 million to hold schools and counties harmless in the next federal fiscal year. We urge you to push for a sustainable solution respecting the hardship of lost tax revenues in forest counties and schools.

Thank you in advance for your efforts on behalf of Montana and its schoolchildren.

Sincerely,


Governor Brian Schweitzer


Superintendent Linda McCulloch

• 1227 11th Avenue • P.O. Box 202501 • Helena, Montana 59620-2501 •

tel: (406) 444-3095 • Fax: (406) 444-2893 • TDD (406) 444-0169 • www.opi.mt.gov



Cobb, Senator John

From: cobb ranch [cobbchar@3rivers.net]
Sent: Monday, February 05, 2007 10:18 AM
To: Cobb, Senator John
Subject: FW: Support of SB 362

-----Original Message-----

From: Carol Bellin [mailto:cbellin@igc.org]
Sent: Monday, February 05, 2007 10:09 AM
To: cobbchar@3rivers.net
Subject: Support of SB 362

Dear Senator Cobb:

I am writing to thank you for introducing SB 362 – Compensation of School District Trustees. I want to do whatever I can to help you to achieve the enactment of this legislation. I wish I could be in Helena today to speak to it in Committee. Please let me know what I can do to help. If there are legislators that you think I should call to express my support for this bill, please let me know and I will make the calls.

I am a parent of a 5th grade student in public school. We are a low-moderate income family. I served one term as a school board trustee. After three years of dedicated service of at times, upwards of 20 hours per week volunteer time, I left office with a significant financial debt that my family has sacrificed so that I could serve. I have always been active as an involved parent, volunteering at school, serving on the PTA, attending school board meetings, etc. Serving as a trustee changed life for my family. I became even more involved and educated. Due to the current level of knowledge and responsibility required of school board trustees to provide adequate oversight of the public trust (legal, fiscal, personnel, etc) especially in large school districts, significant volunteer time is required to fulfill the duties. I found it nearly impossible to maintain my full-time job and give the attention required to all of the fiduciary duties required of a trustee. In the end I gave up my job so that I could better advocate for all of the children in need of a voice for the importance of public education to our future here in Montana.

I would like to see more individuals from low or moderate incomes be represented on our school boards, as this would be a truer demographic reflection of the constituency that is represented. Having the equivalent of a small stipend or access to a health insurance program could make a difference for some concerned and involved parents, who would like to serve their school district, but are unable to afford such an extensive volunteer commitment. I don't think it is fair that our schools be directed only by those who are wealthy enough to offer this volunteer service.

Your bill is a beginning towards recognizing that school board trustees are no different than state legislators in their desire and capability to serve. Unlike state legislators who are compensated and have access to health insurance, school board trustees serve year round for 3-year terms with absolutely no compensation. They deserve some measure of recognition through the reimbursements you propose. Thank you.

Carol Bellin
720 S. 5th Street W.
Missoula, MT 59801
(406) 542-5223
cbellin@igc.org

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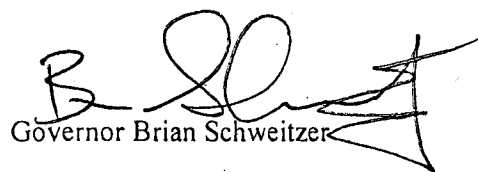
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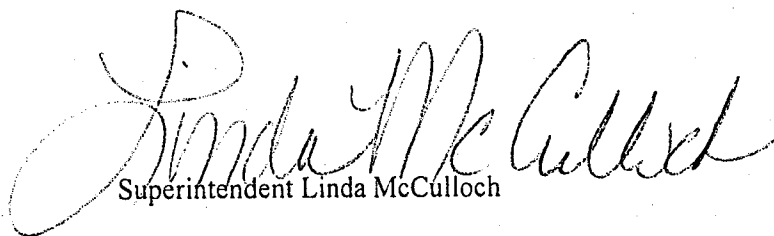
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